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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000207

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SUBJECT: VIENNA DECENTRALIZATION TALKS: KEEPING THE SERBS ENGAGED

REF: BELGRADE 193

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt, (Reasons 1.4 B&D)

#### Summary

1.(C) Discussions with Tadic advisor Leon Kojen, EU Representative Lehne and sources in local UN headquarters here suggest a disconnect between Belgrade and others on what is to be achieved in the Vienna decentralization talks on 2/20. Kojen and the PM's office have made it clear to us that they are ready and eager to start talks and are expecting a serious multi-round negotiation. If the Vienna meeting does not signal clearly that Serb concerns on decentralization will be addressed seriously, there is a risk that Belgrade will walk away from the session convinced that there is no future in further talks. End Summary.

#### Kojen's Comments on "Tough Message" and Way Ahead

2.(C) President Tadic's chief Kosovo negotiator, Leon Kojen told poloffs on February 9 that Belgrade would not "overreact" to the tough messages delivered by U.S. Special Envoy Wisner and UK Political Director Sawers (Reftel). Tracking with how Kostunica responded to Wisner, Kojen suggested Belgrade will just simply choose not to believe what they heard. Kojen said he had been expecting Sawers to be tougher than Wisner but was taken back at how "roughly" and undiplomatically Sawers had presented his points. Kojen noted several asides that led him to believe that the Serb position would not be well received in Vienna: "Tony Blair did not go to war over Kosovo to see Serbia get it back"; "These won't be negotiations on status, but rather the status of the Serb minority in Kosovo"; and, "Kosovo Serbs think they can live their separate lives, but we will insist that fully integrate into a multi-ethnic Kosovo." Kojen thought it completely unrealistic, given the current hostility between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, to think that, in the near term, Kosovo Serbs would be willing to live integrated with Albanians. He said he also found it incomprehensible how "Belgrade could be denied the right to sit at the table and discuss the fate of part of our country."

#### Concerns about Vienna

3.(C) Kojen said Belgrade was ready and eager to start talks, calling them "long overdue." He noted that he had met with Rohan in Vienna in late January, and was incredulous about some of the details on how the talks were being set up. He said that Rohan had initially suggested one session, beginning with statements from the two sides, followed by an overly ambitious agenda covering a full range of issues from decentralization to protection of cultural heritage and socially owned enterprises. Kojen pushed for an initial session in which they would discuss "general principles" for the talks, followed by separate sessions in which they could hash out the various issues. Rohan insisted on keeping to the original schedule ) night of the 19th and all day on the 20th, but agreed to turn a ceremonial dinner on the evening of February 19 into a working session on the general principles, followed by separate sessions on decentralization, and non-decentralization issues (religious sites, and public utilities/socially owned enterprises) on the 20th. Kojen said that everything was still being discussed; he would continue to push for an overall lighter agenda and a longer session when he meets with Rohan in Belgrade on Tuesday February 14.

4.(C) Kojen also said he was concerned after a discussion with Stefan Lehne that Ahtisaari planned to hold "seven chapters" of simultaneous talks, "occurring in parallel, not sequentially." (Lehne was in Belgrade on Feb. 8-9 on one of his periodic swings through.) Kojen thought it would make more sense to build momentum on the key topic of decentralization, the results of which would likely inform the debate on other topics. Kojen expressed frustration that Belgrade has not had a chance to see the new Albanian decentralization plan, which both Rohan and Lehne told him "was a positive step forward". Kojen thought that it would be more productive to see it before the Vienna meeting so that Belgrade could prepare a proper response.

5.(C) Kojen also expressed his dismay to Lehne about some of Sawers remarks ) not about status but about decentralization ) when he saw him on February 8. Kojen believed his insistence on an opening session on general principles was reasonable in order to ensure substantive talks. If the Albanians simply state that they will not negotiate on anything until they have independence, he said, we will not make progress on anything ) Pristina will just always refer back to the general principles. Kojen said he asked Lehne whether the idea was to channel decentralization into some sort of multi-ethnic utopia that will never work. "In that case," he said, "it would be meaningless for us to participate."

6.(C) Comment: Despite the tough messages it has received over the last week, Belgrade is still committed to going to Vienna. They are going convinced that they will be able to engage in a real way about substantive issues related to minority rights. Kojen was not predicting a train crash, but he did express repeated puzzlement that Rohan seemed to be setting up the talks as if they were a one-off instead of the start of a process.

7.(C) We need to ensure that Vienna reflects the seven non-final status points in the eight part tough message that Wisner delivered to Belgrade last week. An encouraging first round in Vienna is the necessary condition to keep the Serbs, especially Kostunica, at the table. There is already talk around town about a parliamentary session on final status that will no doubt be designed to give Kostunica a clear mandate to reject any independence option. We will be working with the PM's office and our parliamentary sources over the coming days to advise against any such parliamentary session, at least until after the first round of Vienna. We will also speak with Rohan about his talks with the Serbs when he is here next week. Department may also wish to consider a Wisner-Ahtisaari call to urge taking the Serbs seriously in Vienna. END COMMENT.  
POLT